

**Contemporary Slavery and Racial Discrimination:  
Civil Society Support to Survivors during the Global Pandemic**

**Webinar on the International Day for the Abolition of Slavery**  
*2 December 2020, 12:00 – 13:30*

**Statement: Mr. Roque Renato Pattussi (General Coordinator, Centro de Apoio e Pastoral do Migrante (CAMI), Brazil)**

*[MODERATOR: Can you please tell us about the role of racial discrimination in forced labour in the textile industry in Brazil and the work of your organization in the city of São Paulo? What is the impact of COVID-19 on survivors in the textile industry and what are your strategies to assist them in this context?]*

On behalf of CAMI, I thank the United Nations Human Rights Office for the invitation and the opportunity to be here today.

Since 2005, CAMI engages in the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights of immigrants and refugees, gender equality, social integration, prevention of forced labor, child labor and human trafficking, through reception and care of rescued victims, support on migratory regularization, legal advice, professional courses, social work, women immigrant and refugee group in 13 neighborhoods, visits to sewing workshops, advocacy and sensitizing Brazilian society to the values of inclusion and solidarity, and, most of all, combating discrimination and xenophobia. We normally attend more than 50 thousand people from more than 27 different nations.

Workers from other countries bring specific demands. Many are in an irregular migratory situation which, together with discrimination, xenophobia and the language barrier, increases their vulnerability to situations of exploitation, many amounting to contemporary forms of slavery.

Many Latin Americans live in São Paulo, particularly Bolivians, Paraguayans, Argentines, Peruvians, Chileans and, recently, Venezuelans. It is estimated that there are 400,000 immigrants who are in a situation of vulnerability and without documents. There are also a great number of Haitians and people from African countries arriving as refugees.

Today, there are more than 1 million immigrants in Brazil according to official data and people from 197 countries with different languages.

Many of them live in occupied buildings, on the outskirts of large cities, victims of all types of violence and more exposed to Covid19. Racial discrimination and xenophobia strongly affect most immigrants and refugees specially Africans and indigenous descendent people. In Brazil, black people represent 56% of the population and have little access to positions of representation and leadership in addition to being the biggest victims of police violence, unemployment, exclusion. They suffer discrimination and daily prejudice, resulting in deaths caused by the color of skin.

Since 1995, more than 55 thousand workers have been rescued from slavery. The majority are Black or Indigenous decedents. In São Paulo, more than 93 % of women rescued from slave labor are immigrants. In the textile industry, where a large part of slavery-like work

is concentrated in the city of São Paulo, working conditions are degrading, working from fourteen to seventeen hours a day, where work and private life blend together, workers live and eat in the same workplace, sleeping on a mat that extends behind their sewing machine. With serious consequences of risks of respiratory diseases, such as tuberculosis, anemia, easy to be infected of covid 19, among other health risks.

Today, there are more than 20 thousand of small sewing offices in São Palo. Fashion brands that want to hire services have an inexhaustible menu of clandestine or irregular sweatshops. The contractor has infinite options of small sewing offices and pay a very low price per piece due to strong competition. When workers are brought to Brazil, the conditions are not clearly set. But the reality is that they have to work for 6 months for free to pay the human trafficker they receive around 100 to 150 dollars a month. They promise to provide home, food and work, but there is no home, there is a sweatshop. Every room is field with sewing machines.

The presence of children has been growing alarmingly in sweatshops, which is equivalent to child labor once they work 4 to 6 hours a day “helping” their parents.

Several Brazilian clothing brands have already been caught with child labor and young and adult slavery. Brazil is internationally recognized as an advanced country in confronting contemporary slave labor, firstly because there is recognition that the problem exists and a legislative and institutional framework to address the problem. However, measures are insufficient and most of the victims rescued, don't have social inclusion and sufficient qualification for a new job.

The covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated vulnerabilities, but our organization keeps providing support and assistance. Since the first week of the quarantine, we have had thousands of calls asking for food, showing the fragility of these families. we had no choice. Between suffering with covid19 or watching others die hungry, we chose to fight hunger and collect and distribute food. We created a committee to face the pandemic crisis. The entire Cami team (more than 50 people between employers and volunteers) got involved in giving support to them in matters such as obtaining the emergency aid paid by the Government, issues of eviction of properties or places where they worked. We were afraid, but the greatest fear was our children and families starving. To date, since the beginning of the quarantine in March, CAMI has distributed more than 10,000 food baskets and hygiene kits for immigrants and refugees who have lost their job activities. Over 19 thousand people were attended, in person or on-line, in the various services offered, such as migratory regularization, social work, legal advice and courses. The support provided from UN Voluntary Trust Fund on contemporary forms of slavery has been of fundamental importance for the maintenance of our activities to help people who have become slaves. CAMI also works to combat all types of violence and prevent further exploitation.

We live in a context very conducive to the loss of what has already been achieved in the difficult fight against discrimination and contemporary slavery. Today we invite you all to rescue our values of humanity and combat these crimes which are the most significant violations of human rights. No more slaves, no more borders. We are all brothers! Solidarity, solidarity, solidarity!!! Thank you all!